Washington State Department of Transportation

Washington State Ferries

MEETING SUMMARY
WSF PORT TOWNSEND / COUPEVILLE VRS PARTNERSHIP MEETING
COTTON BUILDING, PORT TOWNSEND, WA
Thursday November 3, 2011   5:30 – 7:30 p.m.

Note: This meeting summary represents notes from the Washington State Department of Transportation Ferries Division (WSF) Partnership Group Meeting, and is not a formal transcript or minutes. It is provided as a record for the staff, group members and public in attendance, and other interested parties.

Welcome and Introductions
WSDOT Assistant Secretary David Moseley

David welcomed the group members and thanked them for coming. David also introduced himself and the Washington State Ferries (WSF) team.

Group members introduced themselves.

Partnership Overview
Heather Rogers, Berk & Associates

Heather went over the agenda, noting that there would be time for public comment at the end of the meeting.

Heather then discussed the roles and responsibilities of the group members and the meeting plan for the 5 meetings planned between fall of 2011 and summer of 2012 (see page 2 of handout packet).

Questions & Comments
1. (Bob Clay) When you say the rollout will be in June & July, does that mean it will be available to the public?
   Yes.
2. (Tom Thiersch) Is there a single point of contact for the group? Also, could you set up a group discussion area on the web so that we can discuss this online rather than by email?
   We will look into that.

Vehicle Reservation Project Update
WSF Deputy Chief of Operations George Capacci
Brian Churchwell, WSF IT Department

George went over the Vehicle Reservations System (VRS) history (see page 3 of handout packet).

Brian went over the VRS implementation schedule going forward (see page 4 of the handout packet).

Questions & Comments
1. (Ian Jefferds) How will the new system work logistically? At Coupeville you get people lined up all the way to Fort Casey; if they're stuck way up in the line and they have a reservation, how will you handle that?

This system will include a deposit when you make a reservation, which reduces the no-show rate considerably. We believe that this system will alleviate much of the backups that we see at the terminals. However, we will be implementing some improvements such as signs near Fort Casey directing customers with a reservation to go into the left lane, while those without a reservation would use the right lane. In this way people with reservations would be able to bypass any backed up traffic, and pull directly into the second booth. The tollbooths at Port Townsend and Coupeville are now side by side rather than in a line, and one booth will be dedicated to processing reservations.

2. (David Sullivan) Will there be any consideration of a change fee if someone was to change their reservation?
   That is an issue that we will talk about.
3. (Robert Hammett) Will reservation alerts be sent out by email so that they can be received on our smart phones? This will help customers plan their time.
   That is a good point. Reservation alerts will be sent out by email.
4. (Michelle Sandoval) For those people who do not have smart phones or access to a computer, it would be helpful to have a kiosk on ferry grounds to make their reservations.
   The key goal during the first phase of implementation is to replace the existing reservation system, and then we will look at technological improvements like kiosks. These are the kinds of ideas we want from this group.
5. (Helen Price Johnson) Just to confirm, you will not be implementing reservations at Mukilteo/Clinton, correct?
   Correct. We will only use the reservation system for commercial vehicles on Mukilteo/Clinton, and that should happen in 2014 based on the success of phase 1.
6. (Tom Thiersch) The system needs to be easily tailored by season, route and sailing. I hope this is part of your custom software?
   Yes, we are building a system robust enough to track every vessel and the available space for the different types of customers. We consider it critical to meet all of those needs.
   It will be critical that this system will be easy to utilize on smart phones, ipads, etc.
   A key piece of the database structure is that it can interface with other technologies; that is important to us. We will implement the core system first and then focus on improvements and enhancements.
7. (Kim Younger) Speaking of robustness, right now when there is a sailing cancellation, we cannot make a reservation on the replacement sailing, will that be fixed with the new system?
   Yes, the system will be able to handle cancellations; we can easily transfer reservations from one vessel to another and communicate that to our customers, unlike the current system.

Overview of Reservation System Concept & General Customer Process
Heather Rogers, Berk & Associates

Heather went over the ways that the new VRS will be different from the existing system, and the business rules for making/changing/ cancelling reservations (see pages 5 - 7 of the handout packet).

Questions & Comments
1. (Jennifer Meyer) If you go online and make a reservation and pay the deposit, how close to the sailing can you cancel and not lose that deposit?
   We are still thinking about that; there must be some sort of cutoff time – do you have any thoughts on this?
   I think it should be a half hour.

We need something that will work for our staff; we need to know how many reservations will be on that vessel and if people are cancelling right up to the last minute we won't know. We need people to commit to their reservations. At the next meeting we will come to you with our recommendations on this issue; we are thinking about 1 hour in advance.

2. (Robert Hammett) What determines the customer account type? General vs. premier vs. commercial?

   Commercial users must be registered with us, and Premier account holders will have to travel with some level of frequency.

   I have guys that come to Whidbey Island for the Navy; they make reservations for themselves but the military pays for the ticket – how do you handle someone making a reservation under their name but being paid for by a third party?

   We will make a note of that situation and discuss.

3. (Tom Thiersch) In the past we have discussed a time phased release of space, is that still in the plan?

   Yes.

   Tourists will want to make reservations a good 6 months in advance and it's important that they are able to do that.

4. (Tom Thiersch) My next question is about getting customers "up to date" information as mentioned on page 5; will that be real-time or will it be delayed by 20 minutes?

   Our plan is that it will be real-time information through texting, mobile apps, etc. There may be a 2 minute delay, but it will be as fast as possible.

5. (Tom Thiersch) It also mentions a limit on number of reservations per day per customer; some people, trades people for instance, need to make multiple reservations for the same day.

   Right. Our concern is preventing someone making multiple reservations on different vessels with no incentive to cancel. We are trying to reduce the no-shows.

   You should track abusive customers.

   That will be part of the system, the ability to track high frequency cancellations. We will learn as we go.

6. (Tom Thiersch) Having the amount of the deposit be *up to* 100% of the fare is a mistake; the deposit should be the minimum fare that you would charge for a car and driver. This will save time because many people will not need any further transaction at the booth.

   There are many different types of fares; the deposit amount is something we are discussing and will work through with this group.

   You can minimize transactions with that deposit amount.

7. (Robert Hammett) If people are required to pay that much up front and they need to make lots of reservations, that can start to hurt the people who don't have much money.

   Anyone in the Premier account would have a credit card on file, so they will not be charged a deposit up front.

8. (Michelle Sandoval) Will it be necessary for reservation holders to check in 30 minutes prior to their sailing or can it be less?

   We envision 30 minutes, yes.

9. (Kim Younger) That's painful.

   We need the cars on the dock before the boat loads; we need confirmation that you are going to be on that sailing. For loading we need 15 minutes, but if 60 cars show up at the 15 minute mark we won't have time to process them at the booth and load. If the no-shows go down we may be able to change that rule.

10. (Michelle Sandoval) I think if people cancel they should lose their whole deposit, but if they change the reservation within 24 hours of the sailing they should just pay a small surcharge for the trouble.

11. (Michelle Sandoval) I have concerns about people without credit cards, like a 17 year old for instance. How will those people make a reservation?
    That is a good point for us to consider.

12. (Ian Jefferds) The option to change or cancel up to 1 hour in advance is generous. I think very few people would cancel at that point; 2-4 hours ahead of time to not lose your deposit is reasonable. It will give you a better buffer to handle your reservation load. Most people are more likely to be changing to a later sailing rather than cancelling altogether anyway.
    So you are saying that the ability to change should go closer to the sailing time but the ability to cancel without losing your deposit should be further out.
    Yes.

13. (Robert Hammett) Some of us don't work 9-5. If I make a reservation to take a ferry home I don't know if there will be a change in my day.
    We know that return trip uncertainty is an issue. If you were to miss a sailing due to traffic, your deposit would be applied to the next sailing, but you will be standby.

14. (Bob Clay) If I have a reservation on one route, then I decide to go a different way, can my deposit be applied to a sailing on another route?
    It will be route specific, particularly in phase 1.

15. (David Sullivan) You should plan for an evaluation meeting after the implementation of the system to gather feedback and make tweaks.
    Our June/July 2012 meeting will focus on that; perhaps we will have another meeting in the fall as well.

16. (Helen Price Johnson) I would like to echo the thought of having the full fare charged as the deposit; the time made up at the tollbooth would be worth it.

17. (Robert Hammett) The way the system is now, when I make reservations for the month I have to log in, make the reservation for Monday, log out, log back in, make the return trip reservation, log out, and so on for each day. Then I get a confirmation email for each step. Will the new system have one step for multiple reservations and one confirmation email?
    Making reservations quickly and easily will be part of the new system. That is our goal.

18. (Ian Jefferds) From a deposit standpoint, to prevent a financial hassle, will the deposit go through at the time of the reservation, or will it wait until the actual sailing?
    If you have a Premier account you will not be charged until you sail; the others it will be up front.

19. (Ian Jefferds) I assume you will base your reservation allocations on your ridership information?
    Yes, during the busier times we may want to reserve quite a bit of the boat.
    Ridership will go up when people have more certainty that they can get on.
    We will never reserve 100% of the boat. Some people cannot plan ahead and we will always leave room for standby.

Establish Next Meeting Date
Heather Rogers of Berk & Associates

Heather suggested the following meeting dates as options: December 13, 14 or 15.

The group agreed that the time of day for the meeting works for everyone (5:30-7:30 p.m.). The group was equally available for all of the suggested dates in December. The Coupeville participants suggested that all future meetings be in Port Townsend as it is an easier place for everyone to meet.

General Comments

1. (Ian Jefferds) It would be nice to have later runs on the weekends on this route. Also, I've never understood the loading process: who goes down the middle vs. the sides. Is there an operational reason that they put trucks down the sides?
It's difficult to load the boats and keep the first on, first off system going. They do a great job most of the time.
2. (Tom Thiersch) I see that you have room for public comments on the agenda; that's important to keep doing that for future meetings.
3. (Michelle Sandoval) Thanks for talking about demand management rather than asset management.

Public Comments

No public comments.

Conclusion

David thanked everyone for coming. He mentioned that at the next meeting there will be a demo of the new system, and cautioned the group that how it looks at this point in the process is not how it will look in the end. Meeting was adjourned.

Group Members

Present	Name of Group Member
	Timothy Caldwell
X	Bob Clay
	Nancy Conard
X	Robert Hammett
X	Ian Jefferds
X	Helen Price Johnson
X	Ellin Larimer
	Lisa Lynes
	Brian Martin
X	Jennifer Meyer
	Josh Peters
X	Michelle Sandoval
	Diane Schostak
X	Rick Sepler
X	David Sullivan
X	Tom Thiersch
	David Timmons
	Patricia Willesoft
X	Kim Younger
X	Ralph Young

Project Team
- David Moseley, WSDOT Assistant Secretary
- George Capacci, WSF Deputy Chief of Operations
- Marta Coursey, WSF Director of Communications

- Brian Churchwell, WSF IT Department
- Leonard Smith, WSF Operations Manager
- Heather Rogers, Berk & Associates
- Rachel Waitt, WSF Terminal Engineering